



Central Peninsula Church

Catalog No. 1264-2

Psalm 1

Mark Dobrin

November 16, 2003

A Song for the Blessed

SERIES: *Songs for the Hungry Heart*

Good morning everyone. We're going to continue in our series in the book of Psalms this morning. And we're going to pick it up today at the very beginning with Psalm 1. The Psalms are actually a collection of poems that were written over time and arranged into five books. And Psalm 1 and 2 act as the prologue for the entire collection. I mention that only to point out that like any good prologue, Psalm 1 is pointing us to the purpose of the book as a whole. And as we'll discover this morning Psalm 1 reminds us that this collection of poems and songs were written to teach us how to live life well. How to live lives of significance and fullness. So let's read Psalm 1 together as we begin this morning:

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked. They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

Have you ever been lost? I seem to have a knack for it myself. Most of the time they're just minor irritations; missing an exit, forgetting which way to turn at an intersection, just not quite having my bearings. On a few occasions I've known exactly where I wanted to go but I just didn't prepare very well. Like driving to LA and in the middle of that crunch of traffic on the 405 looking for a particular street and reaching for my trusty map to discover that I'd packed a map for the city of Portland, Oregon!

Or maybe you've been in a situation like Robert McKinley before. Robert was feeling homesick. He lived in New York City and he wanted to go home to visit his mother in DeSoto, Texas. But he wasn't quite sure what sort of transportation he should take. To drive would have taken too long. And he thought plane travel would be too expensive. So a friend of his had a brilliant idea on a way to get there and save money at the same time. He could get himself a big crate, pack himself inside, and mail himself to his mother's house. I guess Robert thought that was a great idea so that's exactly what he did.

The news report said: “He mailed a 350-pound crate special delivery from Metro Tech in the Bronx, addressed to himself in DeSoto, Texas. The crate was handled by Kitty Hawk Cargo to the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, then delivered Saturday to the home of McKinley's mother by a company called Pilot Air Freight. The driver did not notice a person inside the crate until

he saw two eyes peering out from between the slats. He reported to police that he initially thought there was a deceased body in the crate, until the person inside kicked open the crate and carried it into the garage.”

And despite the risks and discomfort, it wasn't any cheaper for Mr. McKinley to travel in a box. His total bill in shipping costs came to \$550. For that amount he actually could have traveled first class. But it could easily have cost him more. In fact, the pilot told reporters that he narrowly escaped death because most cargo is shipped in non-pressurized unheated cabins.

There's a guy who made some poor choices and listened to some bad advice about how to get to where he wanted to go.

But how about us? Who are we listening to when it comes to the spiritual development and course that our lives are taking? Are we heading in the right direction or have we picked up the wrong map? I think that all of us here this morning, regardless of your stage in life, whether you're just starting out or nearing the finish line, married or single. We all want to live life well, don't we? We want the days that God has given us to be lived with meaning and purpose; lives that are personally satisfying and full; lives that leave an imprint on others for good. Well, the Bible has a word for that kind of life; it's the word “Blessed.” And that's what I want to talk to you about today: How to live life well. How to live a life that's blessed.

I. Staying Away from Evil

And as we have read this morning, Psalm 1 takes up that theme from the very beginning. **“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.”**

Back in April, my wife Nancy and I had a chance to visit our daughter who works with street children in Lima, Peru. Part of their weekly routine is to go out on the streets of Lima at night, into the shabby red light district and meet with kids who make their home there on the streets. Each time we went we were given words of warning about what streets to avoid, what alleys to stay away from. It was kind of bizarre being protected by my own daughter, but we welcomed the advice and we trusted their wisdom.

This Psalmist begins with a similar warning, telling us that if we want to live a life of blessing we'll have to avoid certain alleyways. We'll need to be aware of the dangers that may be right around the corner.

He says, “don't walk in the council of the wicked.” In other words, “don't listen to or seek the advice of certain people.” The “wicked” here is not the person we usually vilify in our culture. The ax murderer, the Enron executive, or even the politician. The “wicked” is a term that describes the person who has no place for God in their lives. They may be sweet and fun

loving people, people we love hanging out with. We enjoy their company and we may truly count them among our friends. But when I need answers as to how to live my life, they are not the ones I turn to because they are living by a different set of assumptions. Back in 1969 Ray Stedman said that the philosophy of the wicked can be summed up in three simple propositions: "Me first," "Get it now," and "Nothing bad will happen." That says it pretty well. The philosophy of the world around us puts self at the center and says I want what I want and I want it now. And no matter what I choose to do, there won't be any consequences for my actions. That sums it up well. I think that's as true today as it was over 30 years ago. But we might want to add to that a fourth proposition which says: "There is no right or wrong." We live in a time when increasingly the conscience of our culture has been numbed. We no longer seem to recognize what is right and what is wrong. So the Psalmist says when it comes to living life, blessed is the man who doesn't walk down that alleyway. But instead he avoids the advice of the wicked.

Next he says that the blessed man "does not stand in the way of the sinner." There seems to be a progression of thought here from walking to standing. First it's the battle over our thinking; how we make decisions, where we seek advice. But now I'm standing in the "way" of sinners. This expresses a deeper commitment. Touching on our habits, the things that are true of how we live at an unconscious level. If you want to live a life that's blessed, don't stand around or settle into the habits and lifestyle of those whose lives are lived apart from God.

Then finally he says that the blessed man does not sit in the seat of mockers. Now the commitment is complete. You've moved in. You've made their lifestyle your own. You've become identified with the mocker, the one who laughs at God, who rejects God's place in his life.

I'm not much of a shopper. I try. But I couldn't help thinking about shopping when I was looking at this progression of commitment. Maybe it's because Christmas is coming up. But when I go to the mall I begin by casually walking. I'm not particularly committed to the task. I'm just sort of strolling through. But soon, usually through the persuasion of my wife, I find myself standing inside the store, looking through the racks of clothes, I've made a deeper commitment to shopping. And then eventually two hours later I'm sitting in that one little wooden chair they put in front of the women's dressing room. And by that time I've become fully immersed. I'm no longer just shopping; I've become a shopper.

Now guys, let me be clear: I'm not saying that you're going to be blessed if you avoid shopping! That's not the point. The point is this: evil has a subtle way of overtaking us. Have you noticed that? It's like a little rust spot that slowly eats away at your car door. It's imperceptible at first. But slowly it erodes the integrity of the metal and over time if untreated it will leave a hole. But it doesn't happen suddenly. Evil is like that.

It could be that you're here this morning and you never could have imagined you'd find yourself in the situation you're in. It seemed like such a small compromise when it started. It was such a little thing. You wrestled with

it in the beginning but you were reassured that everybody else is doing it. It's just the way business is run. Or maybe it began as a casual conversation, then it became a little more flirtatious. You got noticed. It felt so good and you were feeling so alone and unappreciated at home. You're not even quite sure how you got there but now you're thinking about having an affair.

Folks, if we want to live well, to live a life that's blessed, we need to pay attention to the warning and avoid the alleyways. Blessed is the man who is careful not to allow his life to be slowly overtaken by evil.

You would think that what comes next would be some sort of a battle plan. A strategy for aggressively fighting off evil in our lives. But instead we get a call to chew on the Word of God.

II. Being Formed by God's Word

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night." Blessed is the man or woman who delights in God's Word. The word "delight" is often used in a romantic context. To delight in someone is to find great pleasure in their company, to be absorbed in their beauty, captivated by the mystery. The man who lives well is absorbed in and captivated by God's Word. So he meditates on it day and night. Which tells me that this kind of meditation is not done in isolation while I put myself in a lotus position. It's an activity of daily life. It's something I do day and night or all day long. While I'm driving, while I'm working, while I'm doing the laundry. In all of life's situations, blessed is he who is found meditating on God's Word.

Most of us think of meditation as something done by monks who live up in a monastery somewhere in the mountains of Tibet. It's done by holy people who have the time for that kind of thing. But we can't imagine how it would be useful for life on the Peninsula. It just feels like one more thing to do. Another thing we couldn't possibly add into the mix of our maxed-out lives. But meditation on the Word is for average folks who just simply want to live well. And it may actually mean that I slow down and do less instead of more.

To meditate means literally to murmur or mutter. To verbally roll over the words and ideas on your tongue. But it's more than just mindless repetition. The early church Fathers called this "ruminating." Certain animals like cows have a rather unique digestive organ called the "rumen." That's where partially digested food sits until it's time to regurgitate it back up where it's chewed on again. (I hope you haven't had a big breakfast this morning.) This process can go on for what seems like forever. But that's what meditation is like. It's slowing down, chewing on the Word over and over again until it's finally digested and absorbed in my system. We chew and chew until we are truly fed.

The purpose of this chewing is not so that I gather and understand more Biblical information. We call that "Bible study." That's where we intellectually wrestle to understanding the text. To see it in its context and to come to terms with the author's original intent so that we can be biblically informed. That's a great and necessary thing. And we give ourselves to that with passion and integrity here at CPC. But the goal of meditation is not to be biblically informed; it's to be biblically formed. This is not informational reading where I seek is to have mastery over a body of knowledge. This is formational reading where I'm asking God through His Word to have mastery over me, to form me and shape me through His Word. To prayerfully ask, Lord, where does this Word touch my life today? In what ways do I need to soak in

this word of forgiveness, mercy, and grace so I can be freed up to live in the joy of your love for me? Or Lord, show me how you're speaking to me in this word of challenge or warning today so that I can be delivered from some bondage that is robbing me of real life. You see, to meditate is to listen for the voice of God as it speaks to me in and through His Word. Blessed then is the person who slows down with God's Word; who slowly chews and prayerfully seeks for it to go deeper in. Who avoids the council of the wicked but instead his life and heart are being shaped by the Word of God.

III. Paying Attention to the Seasons

And now in verse 3 the focus shifts slightly and the Psalmist describes the beauty and fruitfulness of the life that is well lived. He says: **"He is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."**

What a great picture that is. The life of the blessed is like a strong fruit bearing tree. A tree that's planted by the water where it soaks up all that it needs to be healthy and strong so that when the right season comes the fruit will appear.

Some of you parents may want to begin to pray this over your children. Lord, make my son or daughter like a strong tree planted where their roots can absorb what's good for their lives. And make them fruitful for the work of your Kingdom through the unique gifts and personalities you've given them. That's a great prayer to pray for the people we care about.

But I think the Psalmist also is giving us another clue into how to live this life of blessing. It's indicated here by the fact that the tree bears fruit "in season." Living well means that we become patient with God's process in our lives. Last year I planted this bush called a Potato Vine in my backyard. It started out as this little scrawny plant. But now a year later and that thing is like the vine that ate San Mateo! Fruit trees are on a whole other time table. You don't grow fruit trees overnight. It takes time. And for the tree to be fruitful it has to have a mature root system. You see, the life of the tree is dependent on the slow growth of what's underground.

I remember when I was just a new believer. I had a great desire to bear fruit for God. To do something significant for Him with my life. So I applied to Scribe School which was a pastoral training program at Peninsula Bible Church. And I remember being so disappointed when the letter came from Dave Roper telling me I had been turned down. Not because he didn't see potential but because he knew I wasn't ready. He knew I needed more time for God to develop my roots; to mature and strengthen what was underground in my life. Maybe that's where you are today and this is a season for you to soak in His goodness and grace. A time where you're just getting rooted in Him. And He's working on the things in your life that aren't so visible. Getting you ready for what's ahead.

But this doesn't just apply to the new believer, does it? On the other side of my back fence I have a cherry tree and a persimmon tree. Right now when I look out my kitchen I see these big beautiful orange fruits hanging from my persimmon tree. But right next to it there's this withered, rather tired looking fruitless cherry tree. Why? Because they are paying attention to the season. They know when it's time for them to bear fruit and when it's time to rest.

I think I'm just beginning to grasp this principle in my life.

I'm finding out that to live life well means I've got to pay attention to the seasons. I need to know when it's time for me to engage as hard as I can in fruit bearing ministry for the Kingdom of God, exercising my gifts and pouring into the lives of others. Those are rich seasons of fruit bearing. But I also need to know when it's time to lie quiet for a while. To cut back when needed. To give God time to work on the stuff in my life, the habits of my heart, that other people never see, to deepen my roots in Him so that when the season is right the fruit will be there.

Are you paying attention to the seasons? It's so important. Maybe this morning you're feeling absolutely spent. You're constantly giving out but you're feeling less of the delight and fullness of the Lord in your life. It may be this simply is not a season for bearing fruit but it's a season for rest. Not a time to be giving out but a time to slow down and let God pour into your life for a while. Perhaps this is a season where you need to be refreshed and strengthened. A time to sit by the water and soak in His goodness.

Blessed is the man who learns to be patient with the process, who pays attention to the seasons of life. Whatever he does for the Kingdom will prosper.

IV. Hoping Beyond This Life

And then finally, those who live well have set their hope beyond this life. The Psalmist illustrates this first by contrasting the life of those who live apart from God. **"But not so the wicked. They will be like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor the sinners in the assembly of the righteous."**

In contrast to the secure and stable beauty of the fruit tree, the life of the wicked is like the husks of wheat and fragments of straw that are blown into the air after the wheat is threshed. They are of no value or weight. That's God's evaluation of the life that is lived apart from Him. And having no root system they are unable to stand in the judgment or in the assembly of the righteous.

This is hard for us, but the scriptures speak clearly and often of this division of humanity. Jesus Himself tells us about the wheat and the thorns and about those who choose to enter the narrow gate that leads to life and to those who walk instead on the broad road that leads to destruction.

This verse points to the day that Jesus talked about in Matthew 25: **"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And in that Day there will be a great assembly of the righteous in Christ, and the wicked will not stand with them."**

And the final verse of this Psalm explains why. **"For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish."** The NAS version translates this, "For the Lord *knows* the way of the righteous."

You see, God is intimately familiar with and committed to the way that the blessed man has chosen. It's the way of surrender, the way of delighting in His Word, seeking after God's heart. But the path that the wicked choose, the path of rejection, is one that God never had in

mind. Jesus loved the Psalms. He quoted them often. And I wonder if He just might have been thinking of Psalm 1 when He said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

God knows the way of those who choose His Son. And only those who believe and receive Jesus will be found standing in the assembly of the righteous. That may be a difficult word for us this morning but that's what the scriptures reveal. And while it is difficult, it is also a word of great encouragement and joy for all those who have chosen to follow the Way.

A few weeks ago I got a call to go visit someone in the hospital. I wasn't given a lot of information. I was only told that their condition was very serious and that the request for prayer was an urgent one.

I didn't know quite what to expect but when I entered the room it quickly became evident that I was in the presence of a woman who had lived life well. And while we spoke briefly about her health, she wanted instead to tell me about the day as a young girl she asked Jesus into her heart and how he has been her passion and comfort and joy ever since. And that she has a confidence that whatever happens now, one day she will be in a better place. And while I was there to attend to someone who was facing a serious battle for life, I found myself instead being encouraged to live in the absolute joy of knowing Jesus Christ. And folks, I've found this curious truth played out over and over again.

The life that is truly blessed has firmly placed its hope far beyond this world. The apostle Paul says that believers have been born again to a living hope. It's a hope that frees us up from the fear of death. A hope that puts this life in perspective and reminds us that even in the most difficult battles we face we are destined for better things. You see, with that kind of vision and hope, everything else in life takes on its proper priority.

I like how Rick Warren puts this in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. He says: “Repeatedly the Bible compares life on earth to temporarily living in a foreign country. This is not your permanent home or final destination...Realizing that life on earth is just a temporary assignment should radically alter your values. When life gets tough, when you're overwhelmed with doubt, or when you wonder if living for Christ is worth the effort, remember that you are not home yet. At death you won't leave home - you'll go home.”

I just turned 50 this last year - actually I'm inching my way to 51. And I've got to say that I'm beginning to think more and more about this truth. I'm realizing that there will probably be fewer fruit bearing years ahead of me than there are behind me now. I have a great eagerness for those days to be lived well. To be days of fullness, purpose and impact. But more and more I see on the horizon the hope my friend so radiantly spoke about. That hope of one day standing in the assembly delighting in the Shepherd. Rejoicing forever and ever in Him. And to live in that hope is to live a life that's truly blessed.

Robert McKinley got some bad advice, didn't he. He chose poorly about how to get to where he wanted to go. And it almost cost him his life.

How about us this morning? Are we living well? Have you chosen to walk in the way that God knows, the way of His Son Jesus Christ? Avoiding the advice of the wicked, chewing slowly on God's word so that you're being formed to become like a strong fruit bearing tree for the Kingdom of God? And are you leaning forward with eagerness into that hope beyond this world? The hope of one day standing in that great assembly of the righteous in Christ. Where we will finally be home with Him.

© 2003 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA